



WASHINGTON STATE  
Department of Social and Health Services  
**Fircrest School Project Support Unit**

## **RHC Communications Plan**

### **For Strategic Downsizing of the State's Institutions for Persons with Developmental Disabilities**

**October 2003**

**"In all aspects of this transition, the health and safety of our clients will remain top priority."**

### **Articulating Our Directive to Close Fircrest School**

**O**n September 18, 2003, managers from across the Aging and Disability Services Administration (ADSA) gathered at DSHS headquarters in Olympia to receive the news from the Governor's Executive Policy Office and Office of Financial Management first hand. The message: DSHS is directed in both the operating and capital budgets to close two cottages at Fircrest School by March 2004, a third by September 2004, and a fourth by March 2005.

These closures will trigger new placements for up to 60 of the facility's residents in the current biennium. The Governor's Office and OFM emphasized that the long-range plan is to close the Fircrest facility sometime in the 2005-07 Biennium. The decision came after lengthy discussions among policy makers about the future of the state's Residential Habilitation Centers (RHCs) and the need to initiate steps to close one of the state's RHC facilities. In the end, it was decided that Fircrest would be the institution that would close.

Secretary Braddock issued the following statement later in the week reiterating the decision:

*The Legislature provided funding levels and direction for transition that assures a rational process. No precipitous or hasty actions are required if we can maintain the timetables established in the budget documents. This allows us to work with all involved to protect the safety and well being of the residents while working with families and guardians to help determine the best transitional outcomes for their loved ones.*

Because the issues related to closure will be sensitive and decisions will be numerous, this Communications Plan has been developed to assure rapid and uniform communications to those who may be affected by the outcome or need to follow its progress. These parties are:

#### **Clients and Families**

- Fircrest residents, their parents, families, and guardians

#### **DSHS Employees**

- Managers and employees at Fircrest
- Managers and employees of other DSHS-operated facilities for persons with developmental disabilities
- DSHS employees, managers, and administrators within ADSA
- Members of the DSHS Cabinet and the Extended Management Team
- Staff internally assigned with central budget responsibilities and legislative relations

## Policy Makers

- Key decision makers at the Governor's Office and the state Office of Financial Management
- Legal staff to DSHS, as appointed by the state Office of Attorney General
- Members of the Washington State Legislature serving on key committees, and their staff
- Members of U.S. Congress and staff who serve as part of the Washington State delegation and may be called upon to make legal or fiscal recommendations concerning Fircrest

## Unions

- State and local union representatives and bargaining officials

## Co-Located Programs and Regulatory Authorities

- Academic or research institutions at the University of Washington and the University of Kansas that co-support the facility through grants or other funding
- State agencies that may own the land and/or buildings, or conduct operations from Fircrest, including the state Department of Health, the Department of Natural Resources, and DSHS Human Resources
- Private/not-for-profit entities, which include the Food Lifeline and a Sheltered Workshop
- Community groups using the gymnasium, swimming pool facility, and gardens
- Agencies with regulatory authority over state-run institutions for the developmentally disabled
- Federal authorities at the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services that are in a fiscal or regulatory oversight/monitoring capacity

## Statewide Organizations and Local Communities

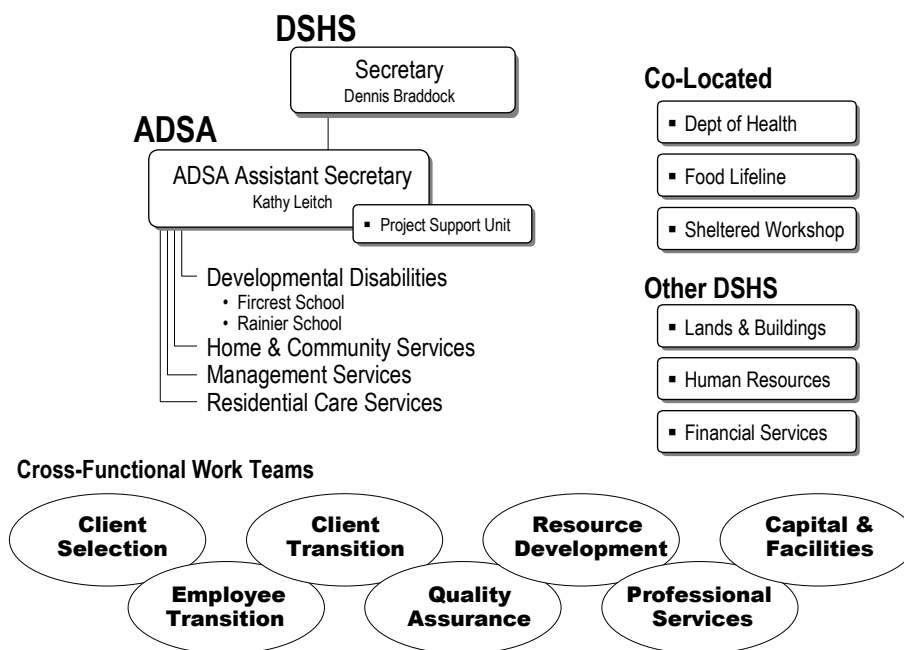
- The Shoreline community, including city and county governments, the local Chamber of Commerce, and interested business groups
- Other stakeholder interests who – at their request – identify themselves as an audience for these communications

## The Media

- The media, primarily in King County, the community of Shoreline, and the capitol city of Olympia

## Conveying the Issues: A Responsibility Shared Across DSHS

### Programs Involved in the Planning Process



## Avenues of Communication

### Maximizing Pre-Established Pathways

Insofar as is possible, this plan will use existing lines of communication by using pre-established channels. That is, decisions will advance through the Assistant Secretary of ADSA before receiving Secretary-level approval. Information will then move from the executive-level to senior-level managers and supervisors in memo, verbal, or E-mail format. Simultaneous communications will subsequently be delivered to line staff and external audiences via written correspondence or in informational settings. Follow-up efforts will be made to inform all DSHS employees through the *Inside DSHS* newsletter, published centrally on a weekly basis. Media and press statements will be released as the situation warrants. Program staff and the central DSHS Communications Office will produce these collaboratively, and politically sensitive phone calls will be directed to executive-level management.

### Supporting the Effort

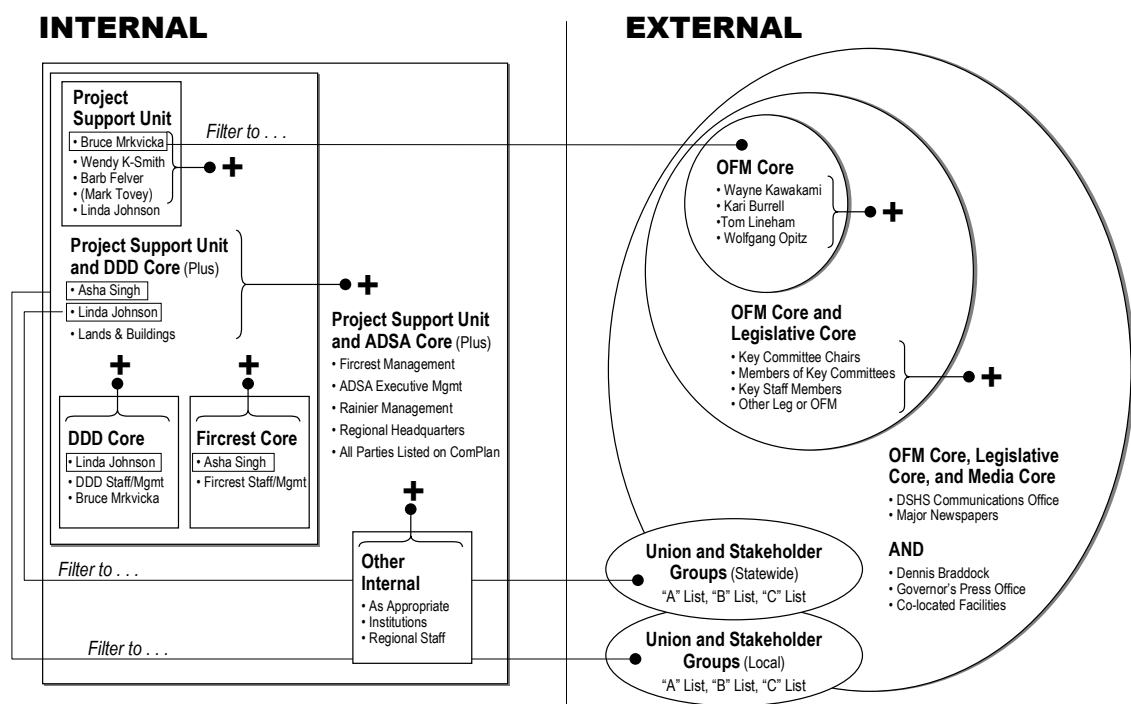
Unique to this effort was the Legislature's decision in 2003 to appoint a dedicated Project Support Unit to assist in the decision-making process, document policies and procedures, and aid in communications. This is a time-limited project – staffed by a three-member support team plus one full-time consultant – that reports directly to the Assistant Secretary of ADSA.

The team is working side-by-side with employees at all levels of the organization to assure that budget targets are met, policies are applied consistently, employees receive adequate assistance, and that appropriate “lessons learned” transfer from past-to-present-to-future levels of decision making. This team will have a significant role in guiding the Fircrest communications effort. An immediate deliverable from the team will be a Preliminary Transition Plan, due to the Legislature January 1, 2004.

Specific with regard to communications was a request in the legislation to:

*Keep appropriate committees of the legislature apprised, through regular reports and periodic e-mail updates, of the development of and revisions to the work plan regarding this downsizing effort.*

## Pathways for Employees, Stakeholders, and Community Groups



## Key Messages

### **1 Two concurrent – but mutually dependent processes – are running in the 2003-05 Biennium.**

1. ***Downsizing to meet current budget reduction targets.*** This will result in closure of four cottages at Fircrest School in 2003-05 (two in FY 2004 and two in FY 2005).
2. ***Long-term planning for closure of Fircrest School in the 2005-07 Biennium.*** A preliminary plan for the transition is due to the Legislature January 1, 2004.

### **2 The current downsizing effort is the state's opportunity to observe, learn, and document processes to assure adequate preparation for closure in 2005-07. Thus, the Project Support Unit is tasked with:**

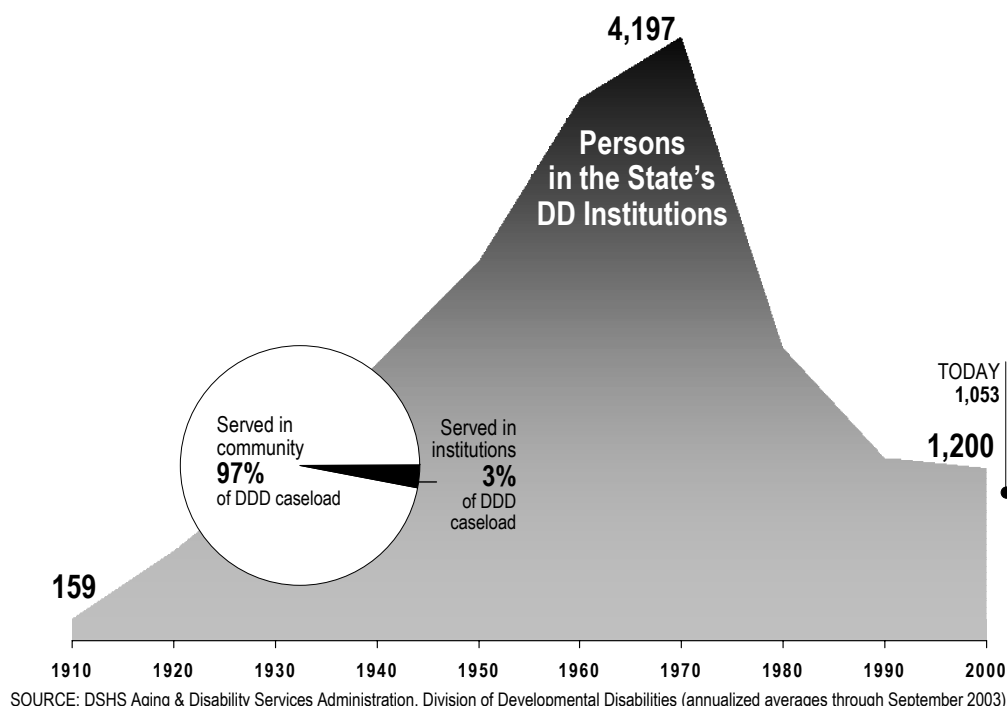
1. ***Analyzing laws and policies now in place to assure client safety.*** If shortcomings are found, these will be corrected. Changes to state law (RCW), administrative rules (WAC), or internal policies will be recommended to appropriate levels, either to the Legislature or decision-making authorities within DSHS. If deemed necessary, implementation of these recommendations will be immediate rather than await delivery of a final transition plan.
2. ***Thoroughly documenting steps toward closure.*** This includes recording program decisions and mapping operational processes so dependent milestones can be identified and mistakes avoided when activities escalate in 2005-07. In the next two years, as many as two residents per week could be moved within Fircrest, to other state institutions, or to the community. In 2005-07, DSHS needs to be equipped to handle as many as four clients a week for a full year.
3. ***Monitoring of long-term client status.*** This includes assuring that medical histories and supporting documents are complete for each client's file and associated assessments are complete for later status comparisons. Privacy is a concern here, as is accordance with state and federal regulations, and appropriateness of assessment tools for persons with developmental disabilities.
4. ***Doing everything possible to assure positive employee transitions.*** This means assuring, for example, that: 1) adequate communications are in place for employees; 2) human resource supports (counseling and advisory services) are provided; 3) state and internal personnel policies are followed; 4) retention and/or retirement incentives funds allotted in the biennial budget are used to the fullest extent possible; 5) new employment opportunities are researched; 6) management concerns are met; and 7) union and staff concerns are solicited for input.
5. ***Evaluating and recommending to the Legislature options for sustaining services unique to Fircrest that are provided to the community and non-resident clients from the facility.*** Included in this list are: 1) comprehensive dental and medical services to persons with developmental disabilities otherwise without access to appropriate services; 2) statewide expertise for adaptive technologies; 3) university and national grants – and a team recognized nationally – for research activities conducted from Fircrest; 4) a highly specialized speech pathology center; 5) occupational and physical therapy support; 6) the largest and most specialized wheelchair clinic in the state; 7) a capital facility modeled by other states for its innovations and accessibility to clients; 8) residential assessment services; and 9) ready-made access to public and urban transportation networks. Also housed at the facility are the state's central public health laboratory operated by the Department of Health, a community Food Bank, and a day work facility for persons with developmental disabilities.
6. ***Assuring budget reduction targets for the 2003-05 Biennium are met.*** This involves constant monitoring of census levels, staff to client ratios (to assure client safety, certification throughout closure, and continued Title XIX match), capital and operational expenditures, as well as developing and communicating recommendations for cost savings in subsequent years.

7. **Coordinating centrally and across DSHS to maximize expertise and report to OFM and state decision-makers the status of downsizing efforts.** Parties invested in the outcome – among the many – are: 1) residents of Fircrest and other state institutions, including families and guardians, who will experience transitions first-hand; 2) employees affected by the closure; 3) owners of the land (held primarily by the Department of Natural Resources); 4) owners of the buildings (primarily DSHS and the state Department of Health); 5) state taxpayers who will carry the long-term financial burden of an aging capital facility; 6) the University of Washington, a contributor to professional services; and 7) the local business community and residents of Shoreline, who will be impacted by the close.

### 3 The state's policy to move persons with developmental disabilities away from institutionalized settings is best viewed from a long-term perspective.

1. **Institutional downsizing in Washington State began in the early 1970s and has been ongoing.** Our resident population stood at over 4,000 in the 1970s, and is now around 1,000 clients. This in part reflects medical technologies that allow us to better serve persons with developmental disabilities at home and in the community. Education and care philosophies have also changed as society has made a collective decision to integrate into communities those who previously received care away from schools, homes, or community settings.
2. **The effort will immediately impact capacity at Fircrest School and Rainier, but has implications for other DSHS institutions for persons with developmental disabilities.** Over time, facilities at Lakeland Village, Yakima School, and Frances Morgan will need to adjust capacity.
3. **The national economy and budget environment is self-evident.** We are downsizing and that is a reality we will face in our day-to-day operations.
4. **Change can bring opportunity.** Though often hard, change can bring opportunities to evaluate options otherwise unseen, reestablish priorities, and set new direction. The one thing we can say for certain is that the future will be different. It is the one constant that is with us. The Legislature has directed DSHS to invest in this planning effort and it is up to us to use these resources wisely.

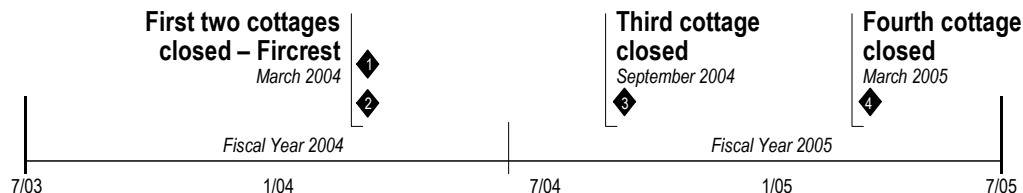
#### Trend in Institutional Care for Persons with Developmental Disabilities Since 1910



## Operations Required for 2005-07: A Project Timeline

### CURRENT BIENNIUM (2003-05)

#### Meet Short-term Targets and Establish a Long-term Plan for Closure



#### Activities:

- Identify and prepare facilities
- Client assessment
- Community resource development
- Client placements
- Process documentation, monitoring, review
- Human resource planning, development
- Initial policy, planning review (those identified as "high priority")
- Deliver final documentation of existing business processes

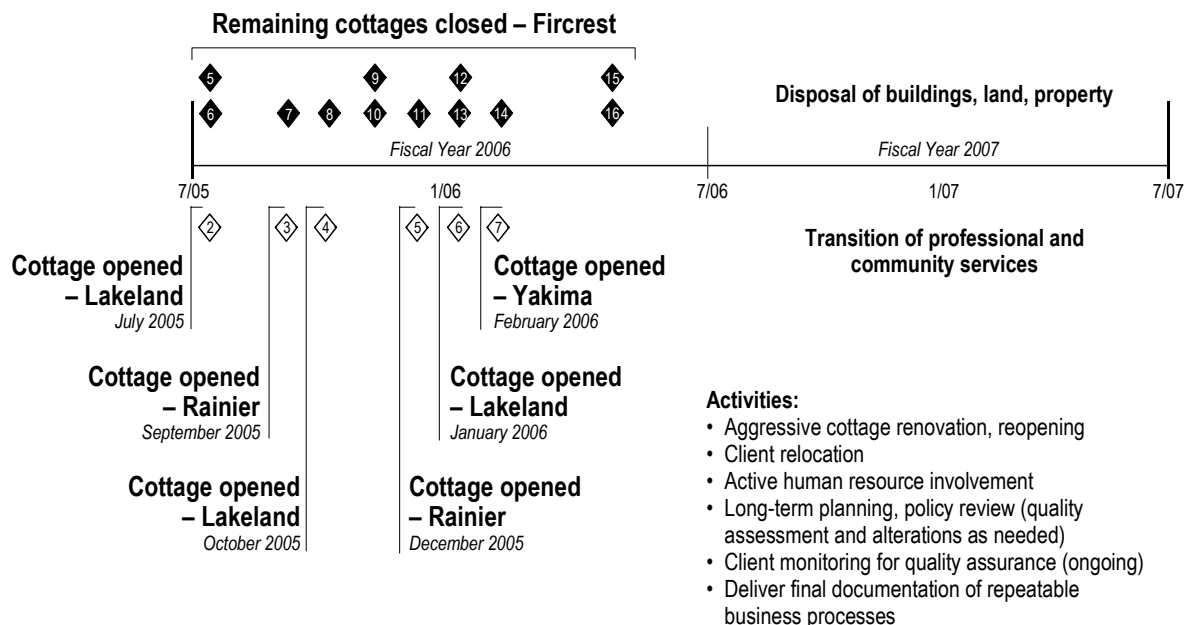
#### Concurrent:

- Facility re-certification
- Continued client care
- Routine facility maintenance
- Lease review and (re)negotiations

### NEXT BIENNIUM (2005-07)

#### Projected Timeline for Full-scale Downsizing and Facility Closure

**NOTE:** Dates shown here reflect those used to support the final 2003-05 budget as adopted by the Legislature and signed by the Governor. These are considered approximate and may be adjusted by future actions of the Legislature or internally to meet budget projections.




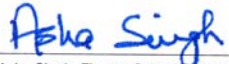


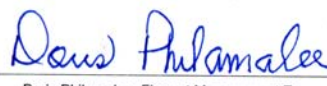
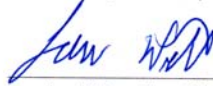


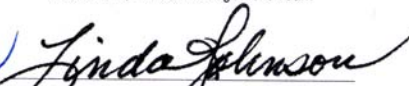


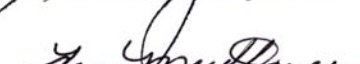




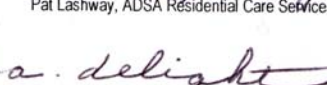

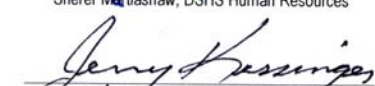
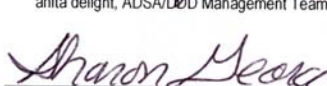
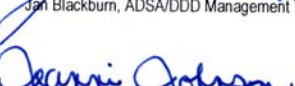
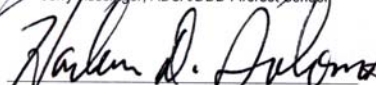
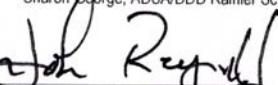
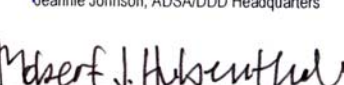
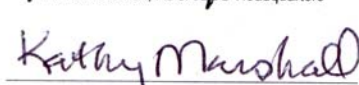

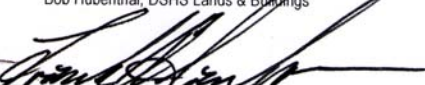
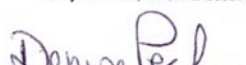

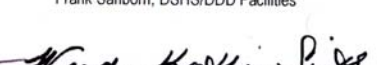
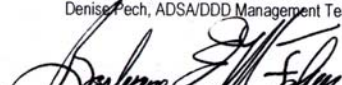
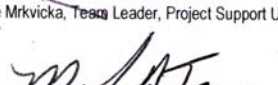
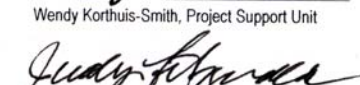
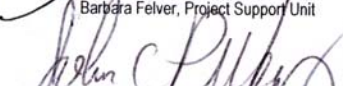

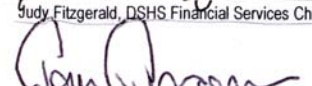




## Management Commitment to Communications

Senior managers at Fircrest, Olympia Headquarters, and within the Fircrest Support Unit have identified communications as a key factor in the success of the upcoming Fircrest project. The following individuals are dedicated to doing all they can to assure a uniform communications effort, one that is open to staff and stakeholder concerns, and can be trusted by the clients we serve.

Signed, October 2003:

|   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| <br>Kathy Leitch, ADSA Assistant Director        | <br>Linda Rolfe, ADSA Developmental Disabilities        | <br>Don Clintsman, ADSA Developmental Disabilities   |
| <br>Asha Singh, Fircrest School Superintendent   | <br>Chris Olsen, Assistant Superintendent, Fircrest     | <br>Margaret McGill, Fircrest Management Team        |
| <br>Doris Philamalee, Fircrest Management Team   | <br>Lars Watson, Fircrest Management Team               | <br>Dave Krona, Fircrest Management Team             |
| <br>Bill Riddle, Fircrest Management Team        | <br>Betty Anderson, Fircrest Management Team            | <br>Linda Johnson, ADSA/DDD Management Team          |
| <br>Penny Black, ADSA Home & Community Services  | <br>Marybeth Poch, ADSA Regional Supervisor             | <br>Larry Merzbauer, Rainier School Superintendent   |
| <br>Sherry McNamara, DSHS Legislative Relations | <br>Pat Lashway, ADSA Residential Care Services        | <br>Rick Bacon, ADSA Home & Community Services     |
| <br>Sherer Mathias, DSHS Human Resources       | <br>Anita Delight, ADSA/DDD Management Team           | <br>Jan Blackburn, ADSA/DDD Management Team        |
| <br>Jerry Kessinger, ADSA/DDD Fircrest School  | <br>Sharon George, ADSA/DDD Rainier School            | <br>Jeannie Johnson, ADSA/DDD Headquarters         |
| <br>Harlan Solomon, ADSA/DDD Headquarters      | <br>John Reynolds, Director, DSHS Lands & Buildings   | <br>Bob Hubenthal, DSHS Lands & Buildings          |
| <br>Kathy Marshall, ADSA Executive Team        | <br>Ed Valbert, DSHS Lands & Buildings                | <br>Frank Sanborn, DSHS/DDD Facilities             |
| <br>Denise Pech, ADSA/DDD Management Team      | <br>Bruce Mrkwicka, Team Leader, Project Support Unit | <br>Wendy Korthuis-Smith, Project Support Unit     |
| <br>Barbara Felver, Project Support Unit       | <br>Mark Tovey, Project Support Unit (External)       | <br>Judy Fitzgerald, DSHS Financial Services Chief |
| <br>John Pelkey, DSHS Financial Services       | <br>Dotti Wilke, ADSA Communications                  | <br>Tom Farrow, ADSA/DDD Communications            |

## Managing the Communications Process

### Checklists for Review

All documents for this project, including correspondence, press releases, handouts, Q&As, informational sheets, need to advance through several stages of internal review before release. Discretion is advised when situations are urgent or persons with lead decision-making authority are absent. At a minimum, the following individuals need to be contacted for the following communications.

### Internal Communications (Formal/Written)

#### CHECK WHEN DONE

- ☐ Asha Singh – If related to Fircrest residents, employees, planning, facilities, unions
- ☐ Linda Rolfe – If related to budget, legislation, policy, unions, employees, facilities
- ☐ Marybeth Poch – If related to residents, employees, planning, facilities, unions, budget, policy
- ☐ Linda Johnson – If related to residents, employees, planning, facilities, unions, budget, policy
- ☐ John Reynolds – If related to planning, facilities, budget
- ☐ Bob Hubenthal – If related to planning, facilities, budget
- ☐ Bruce Mrkvicka – If related to residents, employees, planning, facilities, unions, legal, budget, policy
- ☐ Barb Felter – If related to residents, employees, planning, facilities, unions, budget, policy
- ☐ Wendy Korthuis-Smith – If related to residents, employees, planning, facilities, unions, budget, policy
- ☐ Kathy Leitch – If related to budget, policy, critical or legal issues
- ☐ Ed Dee (Attorney General's Office) – If related to budget, policy, critical or legal issues, regulations
- ☐ Dennis Braddock – If related to budget, policy, critical or legal issues

### External

#### CHECK WHEN DONE

- ☐ The individuals identified above, AND:
- ☐ Tom Farrow – If matters could involve the press, stakeholders, legislation, or DDD
- ☐ Dotti Wilke – If matters involve the press, stakeholders, legislation, or ADSA
- ☐ Jeff Weathersby – If matters involve the press, stakeholders, legislation, or DSHS
- ☐ The Office of Financial Management – If matters could involve the press, stakeholders, legislation
- ☐ The Governor's Executive Policy Office – If matters could involve the press, stakeholders, legislation

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Persons with disabilities or special needs may call the ADSA  
Project Support Unit and request a hard copy:

**360.902.8059**

WASHINGTON STATE

**Department of Social and Health Services**  
**Aging and Disability Services Administration**  
P.O. Box 45600  
Olympia, WA 98504-5600

[www1.dshs.wa.gov/ddd/rhc.shtml](http://www1.dshs.wa.gov/ddd/rhc.shtml)

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